

# DESERT

PLANT LIFE

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MARENOPUNTIA N. G. NORTHERN  
OF PTEROCACTUS, THE  
SOUTHERNMOST CACTUS

*Curt Backeberg*

ASTROLOBA DODSONIANA  
SPEC. NOV.

*A. J. A. Uitenwaal*

PERESKIA AT BALBOA

A TALINUM NATIVE TO VIRGINIA

READING AND REFERENCE

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## Marenopuntia gen. nov. A Northern Counterpart of Pterocactus, the Southernmost Cactus

A strange northern counterpart of *Pterocactus* was discovered in 1910 by Maren B. Parsons at the mouth of the Bacuachic River, Sonora, Mexico. This plant was described and illustrated in *DESERT PLANT LIFE* in 1936. However, the significance of this discovery has heretofore been overlooked. N. L. Britton said of this remarkable plant, "We may have to assign a new genus to it"; but strangely enough this never happened. With the clarification of the *Pterocactus* group, it now seems necessary to place this northern counterpart in a distinct genus.

*Marenopuntia* Backeberg, gen. nov. (1950).

Plantae fruticulosae; radice tuberosa; ramis cylindricis, breviter glochidiatis; floribus terminalibus (!), cum ovario insertis; ramis fructiferis maturis parte extrema turgida lateraliter discindentibus; seminibus reniformibus (!), fere magnis. Patria: Kino Bay, Sonora, Mexico.

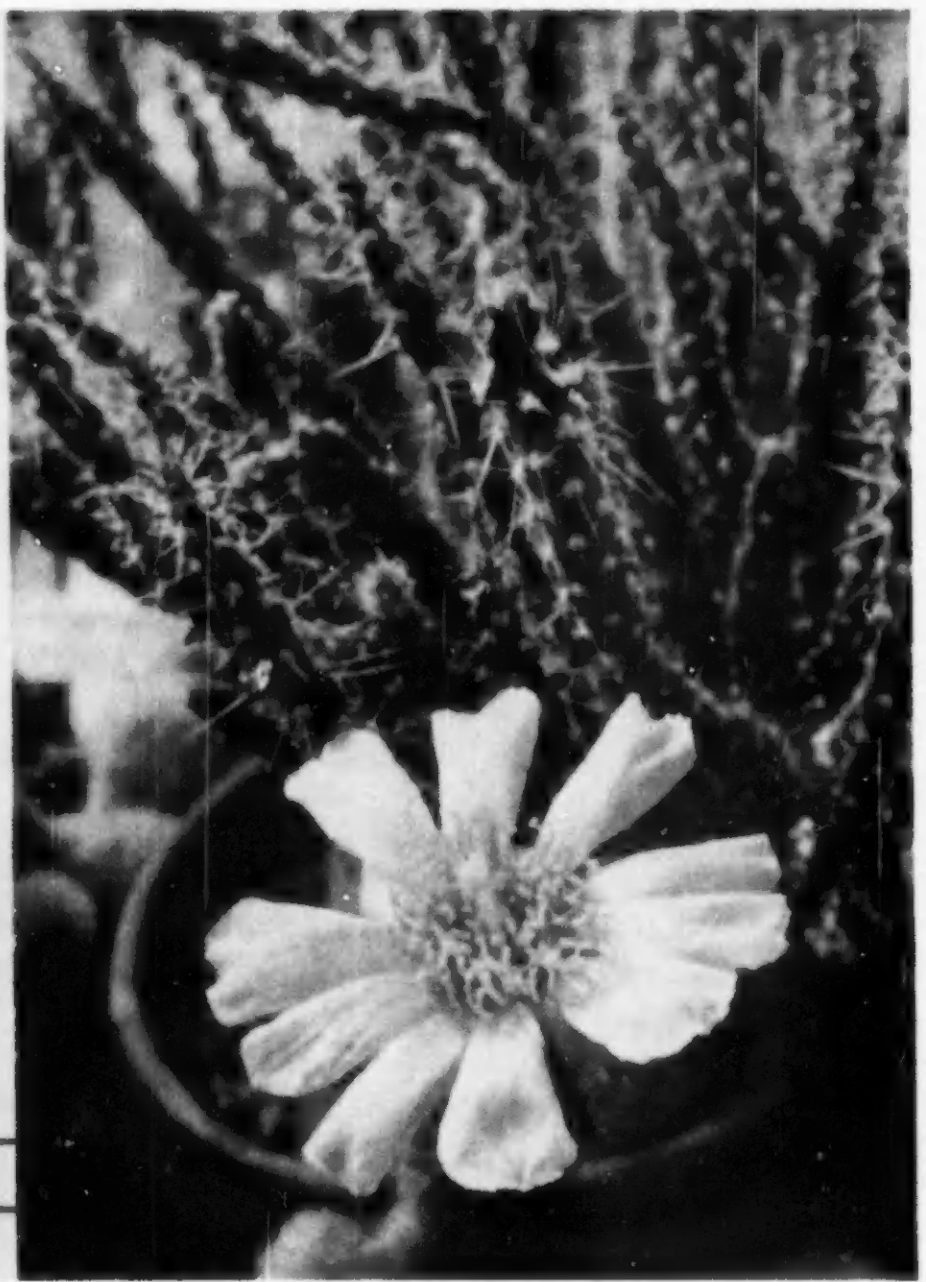
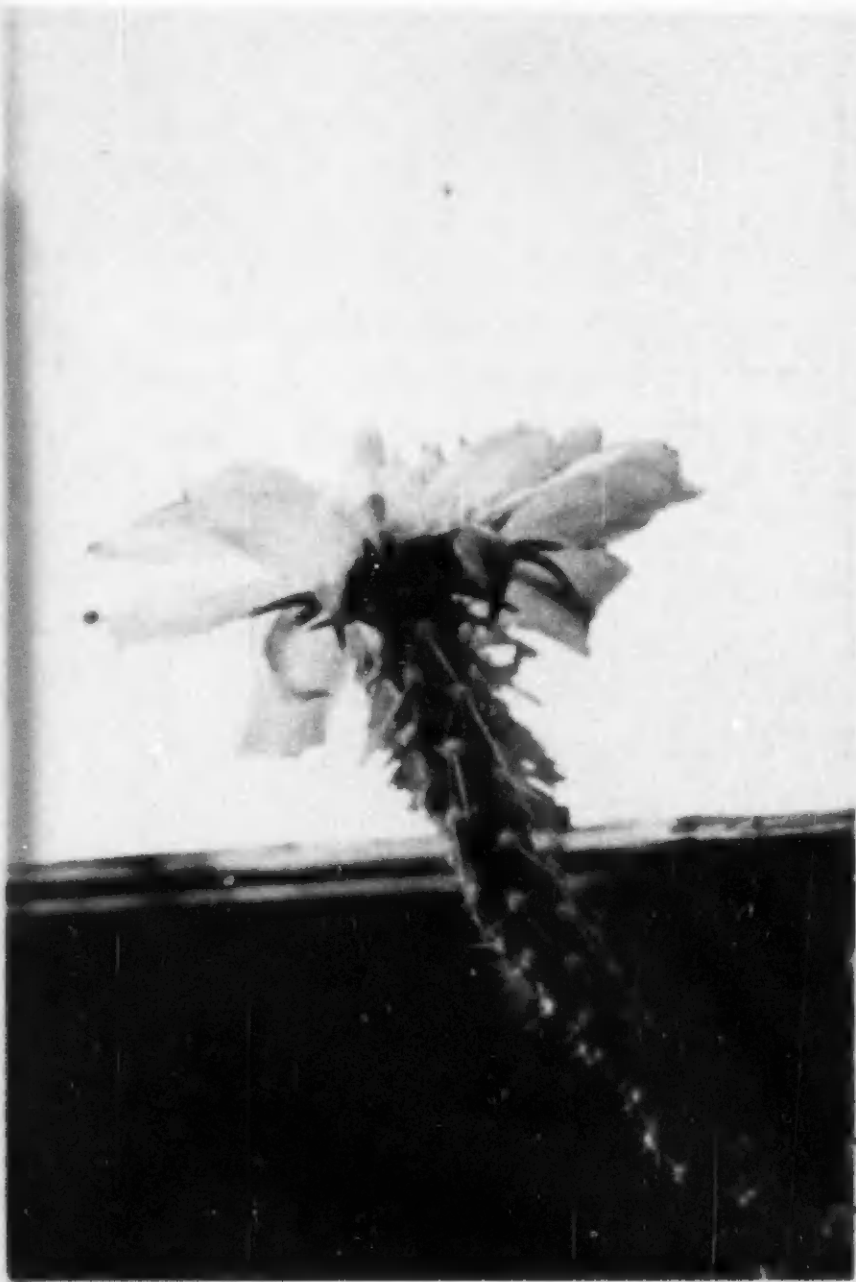
Low shrubby plants with tuberous roots cylindrical shoots and short glochids; whether the spines have sheaths is unknown; flowers terminal; ovary sunken, swelling at maturity and the joint bursting laterally; seeds reniform, rather large.

Type species: *Marenopuntia marenae* Backeberg, comb. nov. (*Opuntia marenae* S. H. Parsons, *DESERT PLANT LIFE* 8:10. 1936.) Kino Bay, Sonora, Mexico, latitude 28°49' N, 111°51' W, at the mouth of the Bacuachic River, at 5 m. above sea level, in thick brush.

The genus is named for its discoverer, Maren B. Parsons.

Once again it is clear that only the principle of careful differentiation of characters can increase our knowledge of all groups. Departure from this principle in favor of collective genera has prevented the noticing of details which show the interesting parallelisms of *Pterocactus* and *Marenopuntia*, which both have tuberous roots too.

To summarize the similarities and differences of *Marenopuntia* and other *Cylindropuntias* it may be said that both have cylindrical joints, but *Cylindropuntia* has no terminal, inserted flowers and the joints not swelling at their end at maturity and bursting laterally. As the discoverer said, *Op. marenae* produces one flower only at each joint, which results by the terminal insertion. In swelling of the joint-tip at maturity, *Marenopuntia* resembles the same character of *Pterocactus*.



MARENOPUNTIA. SHOWING TERMINAL FLOWERS.



## ASTROLOBA DODSONIANA

Uitew. spec. nov.

Caules erecti vel adscendentes, subdense vel subremote foliati, 20 cm. (vel plus) alti et 3.5-6 cm. lati, e basi proliferi. Folia plus minusve distincte spiraliter quinquefaria, erecto-patentia, seniora patentia, stricta, ovato-lanceolata, longe acuminata, apice saepe leviter incurvula et in apicem cartilagineam pungentem brunneam exeuntia, 25-35 mm. longa, ca. 15 mm. lata et 6-8 mm. crassa, glauco-viridia, praesertim juniora pruinosa; supra plana vel plus minusve concava; subtus convexa, apicem versus acute et oblique carinata, lineis multis viridibus et longitudinaliter inconspicue notatis; marginibus duplicatis carinisque cartilagineis, minutissime crenatis.

Pedunculus robustus, glaucus; flores racemosi, subremoti, erecto-patentes; pedicelli incurvuli, ca. 10 mm. longi; bractae lanceolatae, longe acuminatae, ca. 8 mm. longae; perigonium hexagonum ca. 10 mm. longum, tubus brevis, angulis rotundatis prominentibus, sub fauce abrupte constrictus, ca. 7-8 mm. longus et 5-6 mm. latus, albidus, viridi striatus; segmentis obtusis vix recurvis.

Leafy stems erect or ascending, decumbent with age, 20 cm. or more in length, 3.5-6 cm. in diam., proliferous from the base. Leaves in 5 more or less spiral rows, crowded or subremote, erect spreading, old leaves spreading, ovate-lanceolate, long acuminate, ending in a cartilaginous, often inconspicuously incurved, pungent, pellucid tip (brownish with age), 2.5-3.5 cm. long, about 1.5 cm. broad, 6-8 mm. thick, dull, glaucous green, especially the younger leaves with a thin, waxy, white covering; face flat or more or less concave; back convex, obliquely keeled in the upper half, mostly with numerous, inconspicuous longitudinal nerves of a darker green; margins and keel very minutely crenulate.

Peduncle stout, glaucous; raceme with numerous, somewhat remote flowers; pedicels erect-incurving, about 1 cm. long, bracts lanceolate, long acuminate, about 8 mm. long; perianth somewhat urceolate, about 1 cm. long, white with green lines, the hexagonal tube short, about 7-8 mm. long and 1-6 mm. broad at base, abruptly constricted at the throat, with prominent, rounded angles, slightly roughened; the short, white segments, scarcely spreading, outer segm. with narrow, green midrib, faintly yellow tipped, inner segm. green at base, tipped bright yellow, stamens equalling pistil; filaments pale, yellowish green, anthers versatile yellow; ovary sessile, about 4 mm. long, narrowly oblong, obtuse at apex, slightly trigonous, bright green; style ab. 3 mm. long, linear, pale yellowish green; stigma slight 3-lobed.

Locality unknown. I received the plant, figured here, from Mr. J. W. Dodson, San Carlos (Calif.) as "Ap. 015" from his collection. Some years ago I received the same species from Mr. J. R. Brown, Pasadena, under the number "Ap. 31." Mr. P. C. Hutchinson (Berkeley) sent me a detailed description and some sketches of the flowers. It

Photograph, AUTHOR.



ASTROLOBA DODSONIANA UITEW. SP. NOV.  
ABOUT  $\frac{2}{3}$  LIFE SIZE.



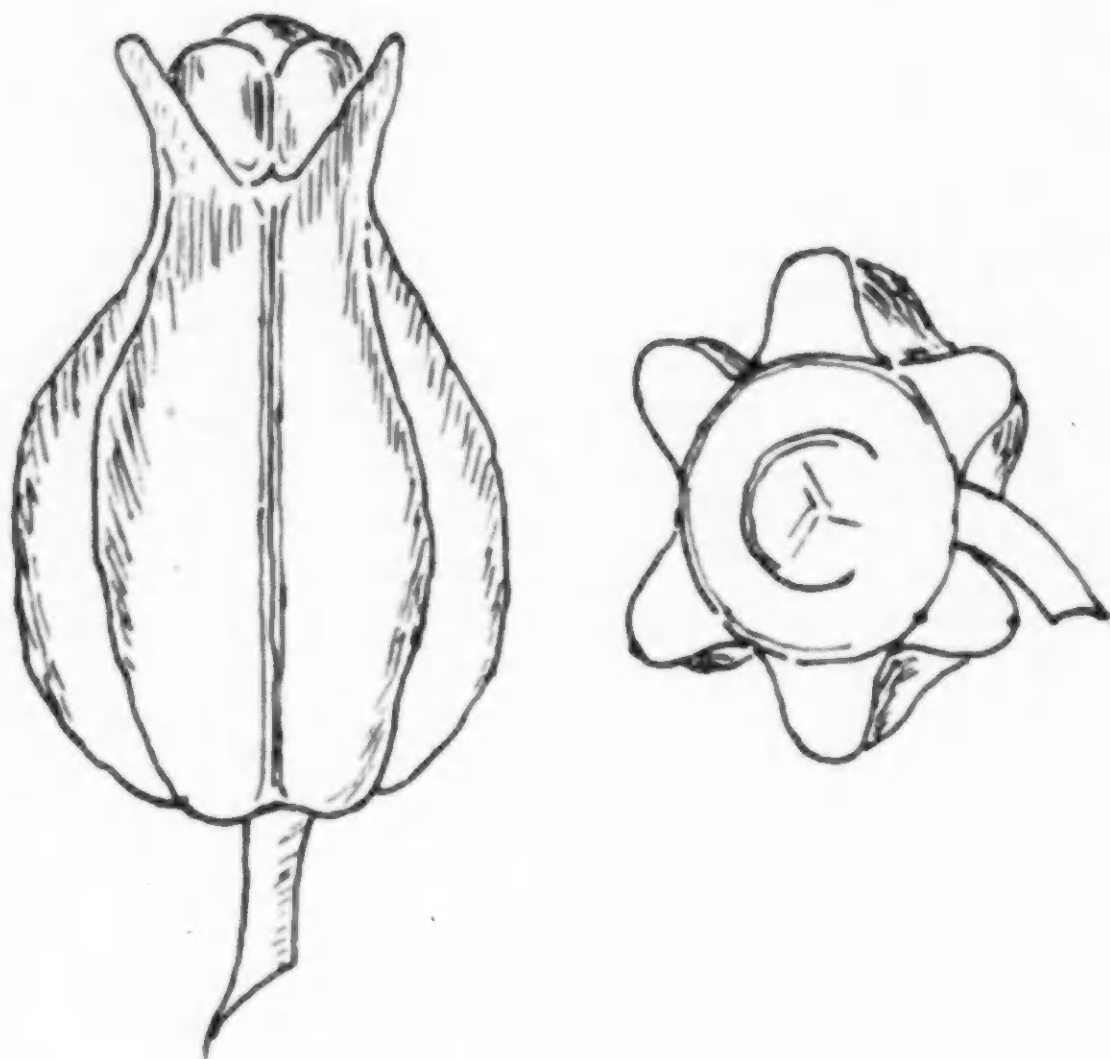
seems to be a fairly well known species in the Californian collections, and was first noticed in that of Mr. Archie Burns of San Raphael, from whom Mr. Dodson received it about ten years ago. In all probability it came from W. Triebner. Some years before the war I received an offset from undoubtedly the same species (though a somewhat more slender form) from Mr. A. Zantner (Germany) who also got it from Triebner. It is therefore to be hoped that Mr. Triebner will one day clear up its exact locality.

I am very pleased to name this beautiful species in honour of Mr. Dodson a zealous collector and specialist in Haworthias and Astrolobas and in recognition of his laborious yet splendid work as editor of the *Haworthia - Review*.

This new species may be compared with *Astroloba Herrei* Uitew., described and figured in DESERT PLANT LIFE March 1948, 36-39, from which however it is easily distinguished by its more erect, and more whitish leaves, which have only very inconspicuous lines on the back, and by its light margins and keel. There is, however, much similarity in the inflorescence. In their somewhat urceolate, long pedicelled flowers with proportionally very prominent rounded edges both the species mentioned are indeed very distinct. One could place them in a separate section of their own, but I cannot agree to creating a new genus, as is suggested. The more so as I have extended somewhat the diagnosis of the genus *Astroloba*, as compared with *Apicra* (under which illegitimate name plants of this genus were formerly known) in order to include species such as the two mentioned above.

The segments of *Astr. Dodsoniana*, as well as most species of *Astroloba* are not absolutely regularly spread, but are on closer examination zygomorphic. Variation of the flowers can be seen under different conditions, the perianth being less swollen (therefore more oblong) and the rounded edges less prominent under favourable cultural conditions. Few (2-3) but also more (5-7-8) flowers may be open at once; this also may depend on cultural or environmental conditions. Before opening, the buds are distinctive with their crystalline, white appearance, the closed segments showing a bright golden tip.

Amsterdam, Sept. '49.



ROUGH SKETCHES OF FLOWER-SHAPE.  
(MUCH ENLARGED).



PERESKIA AT THE TROPICAL STATION  
BALBOA, CANAL ZONE  
MISSOURI BOTANICAL GARDEN

Most visitors, even local ones, need a formal introduction to *Pereskia Bleo*, a little-known member of the Cactus family.

When seen from a distance, this large attractive shrub shows few, if any, of its family's characteristics. A closer view, however, reveals its many branches to be armed with countless sharp spines, which seem to repulse friendly advances, but, as if to counteract this unfriendly appearance, these branches also carry an abundance of shapely green leaves and of showy bright tomato-red flowers resembling a wild rose in shape and size.

It is, however, the fruit which adds the unique feature to this plant. Mr. Standley in "Flora of the Panama Canal Zone" (U. S. Nat. Herb. Contr., Vol. 27), describes it in these concise words: "The fruit is curious and very distinctive, in form a broad inverted cone, at maturity smooth and bright yellow."

The result of a little culinary experimenting with this fruit is rather interesting.

Half a dozen ripe fruits were washed and parboiled until tender, then the water was drained off. A cup of white sugar was added to this water and put on to boil. The fruits were dropped into the boiling syrup when it began to thicken. They were then gently stewed until clear.

When the preserve was done, the fruit was found to have four outstanding points in its favor.

1. It had a peculiarly pleasing tart flavor.
2. It remained firm.
3. It retained its shape perfectly.
4. It lost but little color, and had a wax-like appearance.

It seems likely that this fruit would crystallize easily, and make a nice addition to a jar of glacé fruits. It is about the right size for this purpose, being some two inches across.

*Pereskia Bleo* is a native of Panama and Colombia. It is used in country districts for hedges and forms impassable barriers. Several varieties of this species were planted in the Canal Zone some years ago, for ornamental purposes. Perhaps they have not received much encouragement, for there are but few specimens left.

M. D. H.

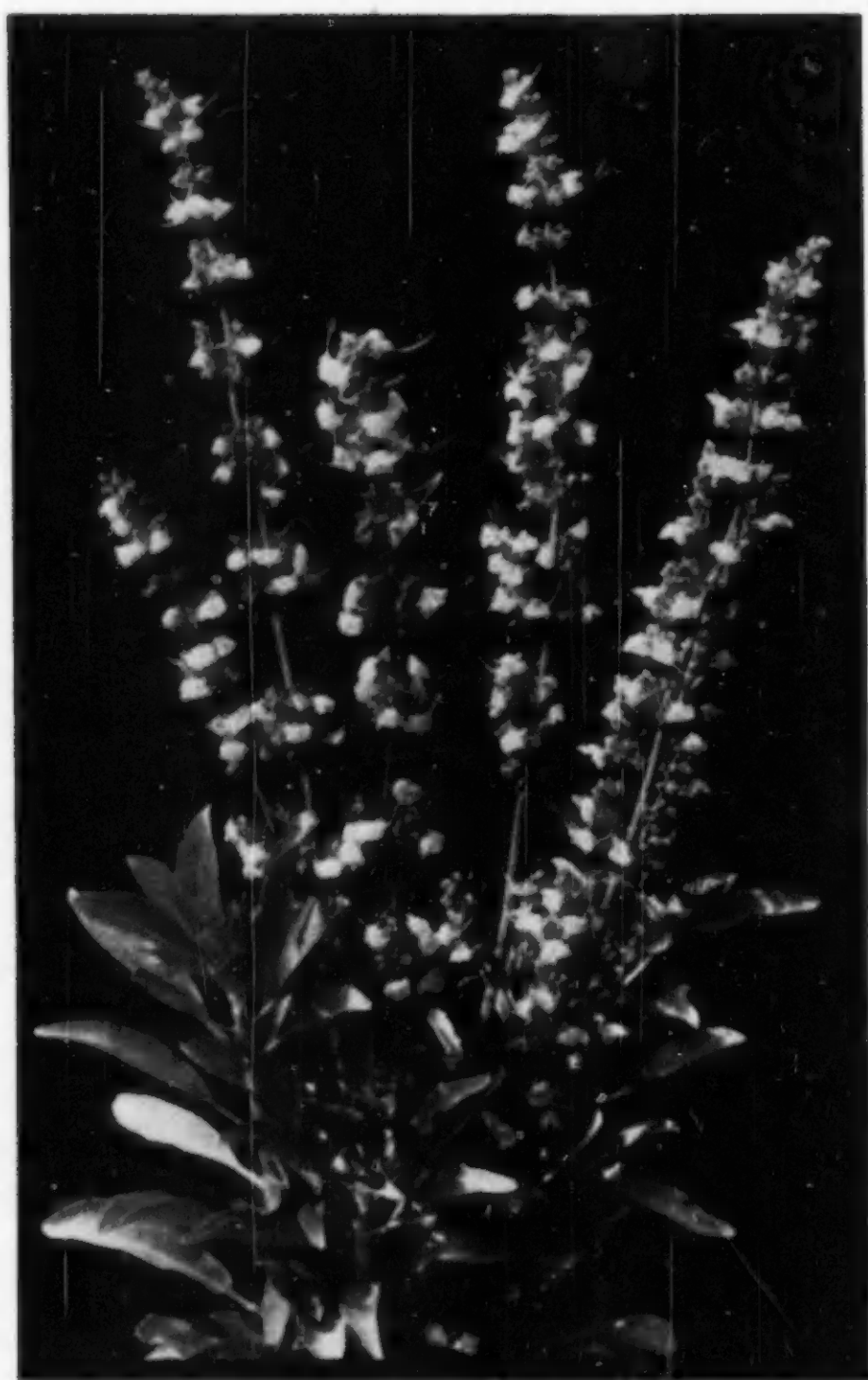
Bulletin Mo. Bot. Gard.

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A TALINUM NATIVE TO VIRGINIA

The attractive little rock plant of the Portulaca family, *Talinum teretifolium*, is coming into cultivation in our rock gardens, but we are accustomed to buy it from dealers, under the impression that it comes only from some remote part of the country. Actually, it is native to Virginia. Dr. Edgar T. Wherry reports that he has found it at three localities, one each in Page, Powhatan, and Chesterfield counties. It is stated to grow in gravel over granite or other igneous rocks, and to bloom only during the afternoon.

Horticulture



WHITE SAGE (*SALVIA APIANA*)  
FROM COASTAL CALIFORNIA TO THE COLORADO DESERT.



## ☆ Reading and Reference ☆

EL ALISO. *A series of papers on the native plants of California. Volume 2, Number 2. March 15, 1950. Published by the Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden.*

This being a horticultural number, a wider range of readers is self evident since there are more horticulturists than those scientifically interested. The history of three California natives by Theodore Payne provides interesting data concerning *Fremontia Mexicana*, *Ceanothus cyaneus* and the Playa del Rey Saltbrush, including correspondence of Miss Sessions, well known for her interest in succulents in the San Diego area.

An appeal still more direct is the chapter: Some suggestions for rock gardening in Southern California, for readers wishing to introduce succulents and other desert plants. The author, Edward K. Balls, discusses the relative merits of Dudleyas, Gormanias, Stylophyllums and Sedums along with other plants suitable for this type of gardening.

The well informed horticulturist will not wish to be without these ninety pages of springtime reading.

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Jacobsen's "Manual of succulent plants" (without cacti) by H. Jacobsen, Curator of the Botanic garden, Kiel, is not to be published in England, after all as previously announced. Part I and II will deal with all families of succulent plants without the Mesembryanthemaceae, 132 genera, 2,500 species, 1,750 synonyms, 450 pictures.

Part III Mesembryanthemaceae. 123 genera, 2,400 species, 1,750 synonyms, 300 pictures. Price \$25.00.

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The same author sends "More nomenclatural alterations in the Mesembryanthemaceae" in a separate leaflet, printed by Cact. & Succ. Journ. Of Great Britain.

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*Kosmos* for January carries a Cactus article with four pages in color by W. Andreae, one of the best known of amateur collectors and photographers. These latter have appeared in DPL many times. For him were named *Coryphantha Andreae* Böd. (1928) and *Gymnocalycium Andreae* Böd. (1930).

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Why do small blossoms drop off epiphyllums before blossoming a reader asks. Several causes may be the reason: too much fertilizer when buds are forming, more buds than the plant can mature, turning a plant that may be in a window. Plenty of water is needed but no fertilizer.

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The infestation of caterpillars as the heaviest was recently reported from the neighboring desert. The crawling hoards infested an area seven miles wide and four miles deep. Another was three miles wide and two miles deep. This was in virgin desert, carpeted at present with heavy growths of wild flowers.

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